

Alexandria High School
Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5411

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
3 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALEXANDRIA HIGH SCHOOL

HABS No. PA-5411

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3-

Location: The former Alexandria school is located on the northwest corner of Main and Church streets, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Gladys Sponsler.

Present Use: Boarding house for the elderly.

Significance: This building contained the first high school to graduate a class in Porter Township; it served Alexandria Borough children from its construction in 1869 into the 1920s. Its modest Italianate detailing is unique in Alexandria.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1869.
2. Architect: Jacob Baker (Africa, 431).
3. Original and subsequent owners: Lot Nos. 121 and 122, on which the building sits, front 50' on the north side of Main Street and extend back 200' to an alley. Bounded on the west by an adjacent lot and on the east by Church Street, the property consists of three adjoining tracts of land.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1839 Deed November 1, 1839, recorded in Volume B2, Page 164.
Reverend John McKinney
TO
John Cresswell.

1839-68 Deed trace is confused.

1868 Deed December 17, 1868, recorded in Volume Z2, Page 215.
William Moore
TO
Jacob Baker, et al. (Trustees for the school).

1929 Deed January 16, 1929, recorded in Volume D7, Page 515.
School District of Alexandria Borough
TO
Lock Haven Realty Company.

1945 Deed October 16, 1945, recorded in Volume G8, Page 638.
Lock Haven Realty Company
TO
Gladys Sponsler.

4. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. A local history (about 1883) describes the structure as "a large and attractive-looking brick edifice, on the Main Street of the Borough, [with] a spacious yard. In the building are four rooms, well-furnished and heated by a furnace in the basement" (Africa, 431). The two-story school was designed as a modest Federal-style plan with a center hall flanked by two large rooms. The principal, or headmaster, occupied a small office at the top of the stairs. Two stairways rose from the entrance hall along the west and east walls, respectively, and north to the second floor.

A stove used to heat the building was vented through a pipe whose hole can still be discerned in the east wall on the first floor. A photograph taken sometime in the late 1800s shows that originally the windows contained six-over-six-light sash, with three-light transoms above the double front door. A shed-roofed Greek Revival porch on the front facade was supported by four pairs of plain wood columns and two attached half columns.

5. Alterations and additions: A 1924 photograph reveals a two-story frame wing extending perpendicularly from the center of the rear wall. The windows are six-over-six-light sash like those on the main block. On to that, a one-story brick extension with two smaller windows has been added. The full porch on the main facade was probably added sometime during the 1950s, when the building was used as a hotel. Two large, modern picture windows have been installed on the east and west ends of the main facade, flanking the three central entry doors; only the center door is original.

The fire-escapes on the east and west facades were added by the present owner in the 1960-70s; accessed by the central opening on the second floor, which has been converted from a window into a door.

The two stairways that rose from the entrance hall along the west and east walls, north to the second floor, have been removed. In their place is a single, straight wood stairway that runs from the center of the hall to the second floor.

The interior of the building has been remodeled. The original two rooms upstairs apparently have been partitioned into several rooms. The existing floorboards have been laid over the original floors.

Gas pumps were in the front yard in the 1930s, say local residents.

- B. Historical Context: The transactions concerning this piece of property are difficult to trace. According to a local historian, Mary Ann McLain sold the tract to Reverend John McKinney. McKinney then sold it to John Cresswell, who owned a number of lots in town, as well as a stone house on the east edge of Alexandria. Cresswell sold the land to the borough for use as the site of a frame or log school, 1841-68; this

building was later moved to the rear of the lot where the current brick school is located, from which it was later removed completely. When the town decided to erect the building, it bought back an adjacent tract that had previously been sold to William Moore (Harshbarger, notes).

A log school house, predecessor of the present structure, was reputedly maintained on the property for several years after the brick school house was constructed. In 1929, after a new school had been erected outside the borough limits, the school district of Alexandria sold this property. From that time until at least 1945 the building was used for a variety of purposes, including a tea room and a hotel; it was sold as a hotel in 1945. The present owner continued to operate the hotel for several years before turning it into a boarding home for elderly residents of Alexandria.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a standard, five-bay, rectangular-plan structure distinguished by an Italianate cupola at the center of a hipped roof.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main rectangular block is 71' x 34'. The kitchen extension on the north wall is 11' x 28', and the extension west of this along the north wall is 18' x 14'.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: The brick walls are laid in seven-course common bond; the two rear wings are frame.
4. Structural system, framing: The structure is supported by brick load-bearing exterior walls.
5. Porches: The full, one-story front porch measures 71' x 12'. It is supported by six fluted wood columns, matched by two half-columns on the facade.
6. Chimneys: One brick exterior chimney is located on the north wall, 15' from the northeast corner.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are three front doors. The original door opening is in the center of the south wall. A French door of wood, with a deep one-light transom, has replaced the original double doors.

- b. Windows: The windows on the five-bay, front facade and the three-bay east and west gable-end walls, are new, one-over-one-light sash; the rear facade features six-over-six-light double-hung sash. Picture windows flank the three front doors. The louvered shutters have been removed, though some of the hardware remains. Each window has a wooden lintel and projecting lower sill. There are modern one-over-one-light windows on each facade of the rear additions.
8. Roof:
- a. Shape, covering: Low-pitched hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice: The stepped brick cornice forms a modest Italianate pattern of corbeling; the corners are treated like stepped brick capitals.
 - c. Dormers, towers: A square Italianate wood cupola dominates the roofline; set on a plain base, each of the four sides has two louvered shutters articulated by pilasters, all under a deep cornice. A smaller, secondary cupola rises from the hipped roof of the primary one, boasting four blank round-arched openings, a wide cornice with brackets, and a metal weather vane.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
- a. First floor: The easternmost front door leads into a dining area, which is separated from the west portion of the room by a partition approximately 3' high with an opening for access in the center. West of this room is the entrance hall, accessed by a southwest-corner door. North of this room is the kitchen addition.
 - b. Second floor: The two original, large rooms on the second floor have been divided into separate apartments.
2. Stairways: One open-well stairway rises north from the center of the entrance hall to the second floor. Originally there were two stairways--one east and one west of the hall--both rising north to the second floor.
3. Flooring: The building presumably features wood floors underneath existing carpeting and linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: The wood door in the southeast corner of the entry hall, leading to the east room, is original.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The former school is situated on the primarily residential Main Street. Opposite, to the south, is the German Reformed Church; two lots west is the Methodist Church. Other surrounding buildings are residential.
2. Landscaping, enclosures: At an earlier date, according to an undated photograph, an iron-rail fence surrounded the school lot. It no longer exists.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (found in Hartslog Heritage, 59). One image dated 1924 and several dated earlier are in the collection of the Hartslog Heritage Museum.

- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-32.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

Notes from Jean Harshbarger's work on Hartslog Heritage, cited below.

- C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of

HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).